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"Although We Cannot Fully Meet" The Roman Catholic Response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*

Peter R. Cross

Abstract: *The publication of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry by the World Council of Churches in 1982 was the culmination of more than fifty years of ecumenical discussion. The document was designed to elicit official comment from the churches involved in its production and also to involve a wide membership of the churches in the process of reception of the text by taking its insights into their spiritual, pastoral and theological life. This present article analyses the response of the Roman Catholic Church. The response is largely positive, but the methodology of the document reveals unresolved tensions concerning theological reformulation while the wider issue touching reception in the life of the Church is avoided.*

WHILE THE INVOLVEMENT of the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement is an established fact, the hoped-for progress towards Christian unity has been far slower than many expected. On the level of theological dialogue, almost unnoticed, work has been proceeding quietly. Theological agreements have been produced, but rarely has official reaction moved beyond welcome and commendation for further study. Though much enthusiasm greeted the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,¹ which was completed at Lima in 1982, far less attention has been paid to the official responses of the participating churches. The Response of the Roman Catholic Church to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has gone largely unremarked.² Nevertheless, this is a

¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), quoted with paragraph references where B, E, and M refer to the chapters on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry respectively.

² Vatican Response, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: An Appraisal" in *Origins* 17 (1987) 401-416, henceforth *An Appraisal* with page numbers.

document of considerable significance, for this is the first time that this church has entered so far into the ecumenical process. In this article I wish both to summarise this response, which is lengthy and complex, and to offer some critical assessment of it. While it is a welcome contribution to the process of dialogue on sacraments and ministry, *An Appraisal* is not without its shortcomings and indeed does not claim to be the final word, since in it the request is made for further discussion and fresh clarification. All this is part of the reception that *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* calls for.

HISTORY OF BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY TEXT

The text presented to the churches in 1982 has a long pedigree, dating back at least to the Lausanne Conference on Faith and Order in 1927, where some scepticism was expressed concerning any attempt to reach agreement between the churches on the doctrine of the sacraments. By 1952 a shift had occurred, chiefly as a result of the impact of the liturgical movement, but also stemming from the recognition that issues touching Christology were integrally related to discussion of the sacraments. The 1950s and 1960s saw an emerging ecumenical consensus on Eucharist and Baptism so that in the early 1970s draft statements on Eucharist, Baptism, and now also Ministry, were prepared. The pioneering leadership of Lukas Vischer and Brother Max Thurian of Taizé should be acknowledged from this point on. Thurian is continuing to edit all the volumes of Official Responses to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. In 1974, after its Accra meeting, Faith and Order produced *Baptism, Eucharist and One Mutually Recognized Ministry*, the immediate forerunner of the present text. It was an innovative idea to send out the 1974 document for comment and evaluation from churches and theological associations. Over one hundred replies were received. The careful assessment of these replies and the participation of over one hundred theologians, from more than thirty countries at the Faith and Order meeting at Lima in 1981, led to the publication of the final version *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

As the editors of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* remark: "that theologians of such widely different traditions should be able to speak so harmoniously about Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement".³ Indeed, as Father Emmanuel Lanne, a leading Roman Catholic ecumenical scholar present

³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ix.

at Lima, wrote, we are dealing with "a situation (that) has been created...which is without precedent in Christian History".⁴

The Roman Catholic Church has had a tenuous relationship with the institutionalised ecumenical movement in the Twentieth Century, but it is now a full member of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. There were at least twelve Roman Catholic theologians at the Lima meeting, among them some notable scholars: R. Brown, W. Kasper, E. Lanne, J.-M. Tillard, R. Beaupère, A. Dulles. Along with the Orthodox theologians, this group has had a significant impact on the final text of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

The wider context of this document should be noted. At the Sixth Assembly of WCC, in Vancouver in 1983, not only was the goal of visible Church unity in a conciliar form restated, but the implications of such unity were teased out. This hoped-for unity was seen to be bound up with the destiny of the human community: peace and justice *and* Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry belong together, for Vancouver was particularly taken with what it termed a "eucharistic vision" which encompasses the whole reality of worship, life and witness. While division remains at the Lord's Table, the Vancouver Report points us forward, for: "in bringing forth the organic unity of Christian commitment and of its unique source in the incarnate self-sacrifice of Christ, *the eucharistic vision* provides us with new and inspiring guidance on our journey towards a full and credible realization of our given unity".⁵

The hiatus that has developed within the ecumenical movement between faith and order issues and issues touching the development of the human family – justice, peace and reconciliation – is bridged by this statement. At the same time, Vancouver integrates the study of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* into two other aspects of such a witnessing unity: the common understanding of the apostolic faith and agreement upon common ways of decision-making and of teaching authoritatively. The study of the former is proceeding in various parts of the world; the latter is immediately engaged once the churches enter into the process of responding to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* text and ultimately, perhaps, receiving its theological formulations.

⁴ Quoted in M. Fahey, "Genesis of the Lima Document" in M. Fahey (ed.), *Catholic Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (London, MD: University Press of America, 1986) 6.

⁵ D. Gill (ed.), *Gathered for Life: Official Report VI Assembly WCC* (Geneva: WCC, 1983) 45.

TWO QUESTIONS

The editors of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, in transmitting it to the churches, asked that two things happen: first, the widest possible involvement of the whole People of God at all levels in what is termed "the spiritual process of receiving this text", and, secondly, that each church prepare an Official Response to the text at the highest appropriate level of authority. If in the remainder of this paper attention is paid to the second aspect, it should also be acknowledged that the wide involvement of the People of God all around the world has taken place: by May 1984, the English translation was in its thirteenth printing, and here in Australia many thousands of Christians have taken part in home study groups. An Australian Council of Churches collection of Responses lists nine official responses, one of them being from the Catholic Bishops' Conference. *An Appraisal*, published in late 1987, is only one of several hundred official responses that are appearing, and many of these have been prepared after very wide consultation within each church.

Before examining *An Appraisal* it is important to consider two questions that are integral to any response to a text such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, for every response is conditioned by the way in which these questions are understood.

1. *How are we to read a convergence text?*

The issue here is what presuppositions are brought to the text. Is it to be read from a defensive position or, more openly, read as an offering to encourage development of thought and practice? Who is responding to the text: laity, leaders, theologians, church officials? If the text is read merely in a comparative fashion, checking off the points that agree with one church's formulations and criticising those that do not, it will have limited use and even less effect. On the other hand, few churches are likely to adopt the text totally as their own, partly because it does not claim to offer a comprehensive systematic treatment of the matters, partly because the supposed "Church" it speaks of, and whose faith it seeks to articulate, is not yet actualised but lies in the future. The notion of "Church" is alluded to in *An Appraisal* and will be referred to again.

Beyond the question of reading such a text lies the idea of its reception. Before the Great Schism of 1054 A.D. reception was an active process among local churches which enabled and strengthened ecclesial communion while respecting the autonomy of each church. In general, it has been well described as "the process of disciplined

digestion and ownership at all levels of the church's life, thought and practice".⁶ I would add, with the editors of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, that reception is above all a spiritual process. The sort of question reception urges us to ask is: How much of this – the formulation and the practices recommended – can our church accept in its theological expression, in its worship, in its catechesis, in its spirituality? Obviously, a theological response such as *An Appraisal* is only an initial step along this path.

Yet reception is not easy, for the ground-rules have changed since the pre-Schism period. There is a great difference between a bishop returning to Asia Minor after the Council of Nicaea and urging the adoption of the *homoeousios* and the WCC urging the separated churches to receive the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* text. Our very divisions make reception harder and in fact a fresh reality. So the term "convergence" has value because we are still a long way from "consensus" which reception requires, but already we are part of the dynamic process which could lead to it. Might I add that the reception process will inevitably involve the re-reception of certain dogmas in the respective churches. We can already witness this happening (for instance, with the doctrine of the papacy) as the result of several bilateral dialogues.

2. *How are we to understand "the faith of the Church through the ages"?*

This is what we are urged to recognise in the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* text. It certainly refers at least to the faith of the undivided Church of the early centuries. This can be accessed by fresh biblical, patristic and historical research. But that faith is also a lived reality: as Faith and Order itself said at Montreal in 1963, it is "the Tradition of the Gospel testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit".⁷ This has been transmitted in various ecclesial groupings, but some, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, would make very specific claims about where the apostolic faith is to be found. Whereas *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* would appear to locate this faith in the past, and in the future reality of a united Church, these latter communions would claim that the "centre of gravity" of Christ's Church lies or subsists in them and is a present reality. As the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference notes:

⁶T. Stransky, "Surprises and Fears of Ecumenism: 20 Years after Vatican II", *America*, 25 January 1986, 45.

⁷ Quoted in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ix.

This shift in perception of where the Church's centre of gravity lies also affects our response to the document's view of apostolicity, as by our rule only the Catholic Church is fully apostolic, though significant degrees of apostolicity exist in the separated churches.⁸

They hasten to add that this is not a claim to present perfection by the Roman Catholic Church!

In this context it is interesting to note, as do the Australian Bishops, that when the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity transmitted the Lima document to Episcopal Conferences for response, it altered the question to read: "How far is the Catholic faith recognisable in the text?" As they say, to answer the question in this latter way is to misinterpret the question put by *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. They then proceed to answer the Vatican's question, having noted the discrepancy! In *An Appraisal* this confusion persists, especially in the section on the Eucharist. While this shift should be recognised, it is almost inevitable in any church response. Perhaps the most important question is whether the churches will at least consider the new language of the text and allow it, in the words of one Roman Catholic theologian, "to nuance, to integrate, or where appropriate, to challenge and to transcend fixed confessional positions".⁹

THE VATICAN RESPONSE: AN APPRAISAL

1. General Remarks

The first sub-heading of *An Appraisal* is indicative: Appreciation. This sets a tone which is positive and deeply committed to the ongoing ecumenical movement. The work of Faith and Order is affirmed and strong encouragement is given to continue. Within this generally appreciative framework is to be found a careful, well-organised theological appraisal of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* text: it agrees where possible and gives clear and detailed reasons for disagreement at certain points. It is a fine example of the Roman Catholic Church's stated commitment to moving towards the goal of a visible unity of Christian people while holding to its view that unity in faith

⁸ Quoted in The Australian Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *Australian Churches' Response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Sydney: ACC, 1986) 22.

⁹ W. Marrevée, "How do the Churches Read a Convergence Text?" in *Catholic Perspectives*, 53.

is central to such a goal. The Roman Catholic Church strives to keep Faith and Order issues to the fore in the ecumenical movement and this document is a further example of that concern. The desire to clarify issues that still divide and to move towards consensus means that inevitably *An Appraisal* focuses on problem areas of the mutual recognition that will lead to unity.

In the long run, the introductory observations made by *An Appraisal* in view of the ongoing work of Faith and Order will have most impact, for it is evident to many Roman Catholics who have studied the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* text that there are some fundamental issues needing attention so that specific comments on material in the three sections can be contextualised. Basically, these issues are ecclesiological and include the nature of sacrament, the precise nature of the apostolic tradition, and the issue of the decisive authority in the Church.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry has clearly brought the study of ecclesiology more to the fore, yet it avoids specific discussion of the topic, even while dealing with essential realities of the Church. Mention has already been made of what Church is the subject referred to: the undivided Church of the first millennium or an eschatological reality. The Roman Catholic Church has a specific ecclesiology articulated in Vatican II and it sees a more thorough study of the topic as essential for the progress of the ecumenical movement. It acknowledges that *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has opened this up and urges Faith and Order to go further. Cardinal Willebrands, at a recent symposium in Amsterdam to mark the fortieth anniversary of the WCC, reflected this concern when he invited national councils of churches to ask themselves what it meant to be a Church and what sort of Church it should be. As he said: "The WCC would be failing if it were satisfied with static peaceful co-existence".¹⁰

1 (a): Sacrament and Sacramentality

While acknowledging and welcoming the sacramental emphasis in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the Vatican response argues that there is in the text "an absence of a clear concept of sacrament". As illustrations it points to the commentaries on B12 and 14, "the Baptism of Believers and Infants", and also to the understanding of change in E15, on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. While the difficulty with these sections is not detailed, the questions asked

¹⁰ See *The Tablet* (London: 3 September 1988) 1023.

suffice to indicate what is meant: why is Baptism an unrepeatable act? and how describe of change in relation to the eucharistic elements?

The B text uses the term sacrament twice only (B23 and B13 Comm.). The term is used seven times in the main text of E. It is not easy to determine the exact sense in each of these usages. On the one hand, as *An Appraisal* notes appreciatively, the principal features of Baptism as a sacrament are affirmed without having recourse to the term, "which because of its complex history needs a great deal of explanation in inter-church conversations".¹¹ These features are ritual signs which both signify and effect participation into Christ's death, the gift of the Spirit, washing away of sin, bringing pardon and justification, incorporating into Christ. Why, then, the hesitation? When one examines the section on believers' Baptism closely, a lingering doubt remains whether the same reality is being ascribed to the Baptism of a believer and that of an infant. This was a very difficult section for the framers of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, yet much common ground has been outlined, particularly by placing the personal profession of faith demanded, at some stage of life, of all the baptized, within the context of the faith of the believing community. This faith is not just an individual virtue but is helped by the believing community; it originates in the gratuitous offer of God, an emphasis which indeed balances the stress on personal faith. While *An Appraisal* appreciates the approach taken, it asks whether the distinction in the title between believers and infants might be changed to adults and infants (as is the case in the French translation of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*). The Roman Catholic Church sustains both practices and requires faith for each, though in different degrees, with the personal response of the infant coming later.

A similar sacramental concern underlies the request for explicit discussion of the doctrine of Original Sin, for underlying this doctrine, it says, "is an understanding in faith about universal human sinfulness, about the need for salvation, about Christ as the universal saviour and about the necessity of Baptism for salvation".¹²

In more technical language, the Roman Catholic Church is saying that Baptism is efficacious for both adult and infant. It holds that this is the "faith of the Church through the ages", and that the practice of infant Baptism from the earliest times is an indicator of that faith.

¹¹ *An Appraisal*, 406.

¹² *An Appraisal*, 407.

Likewise, the frequent references to "sacrament" in E are noted. At times the term seems to mean a mere sign (for example, E1). Elsewhere it implies a realistic and objective content. Thus the phrase in E15 that by the power of the Holy Spirit "the bread and wine become the sacramental signs of Christ's body and blood" is read equivocally by Roman Catholics, for as the commentary notes this can affirm an intrinsic change in the elements or simply indicate a change in meaning which sets up an extrinsic relationship between the thing signifying and the things signified. (This would apply to E13 as well.) *An Appraisal* notes that the intrinsic change is taken by Roman Catholics to refer to the realisation of a unity of being between the signifying reality and the reality signified. Jesuit theologian Edward Kilmartin, whose commentary has clearly influenced *An Appraisal* at this point,¹³ sees here the beginning of a new approach to the "how" of the intrinsic change, in which Christ is seen as the host of the meal of the Church. In the words of *An Appraisal*:

The risen Lord relates himself to this activity. He places the elements of bread and wine in the relation between himself and the community. These elements are made signs which realise his saving presence, namely, "sacrament of his body and blood".¹⁴

As Kilmartin notes, new categories of being as relational are employed here, or as *An Appraisal* itself says, "a new theological exploration as to the how of the intrinsic change" is being given. *An Appraisal* does not tie Catholics down to the Tridentine expressions of transubstantiation, but affirms the doctrine of intrinsic change, which it argues to be of the substance of the faith.

This question has been given extended treatment because it is one of the chief hesitations of the Roman Catholic Church in two of the sections of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. *An Appraisal* implies that the Roman Catholic Church is open to the reformulation of its doctrine (noted in the discussions both of Original Sin and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist), but it cannot tolerate a convergence which obscures the core elements of the faith of the Church.

1 (b): Apostolic Tradition

While acknowledging the outstanding work of the Montreal Faith and Order Conference (1963) in providing a way forward in the

¹³ Edward Kilmartin, "Lima Text on Eucharist", *Catholic Perspectives*, 135-62; identical phrases from this appear in *An Appraisal*. See also, "The Official Vatican Response to BEM", *Ecumenical Trends* 17 (1988) 37-40.

¹⁴ *An Appraisal*, 410.

understanding of the relation between Scripture and Tradition, *An Appraisal* notes a confusion at certain points in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* between Tradition "which obliges because it is rooted in revelation" and the various "traditions" which may develop in local churches. Instances of these latter are given in B21 Comm. (some African churches which baptize without water); E28 Comm. (use of elements other than bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist in some places); and, especially, in a discussion of the ordination of women, where it is stated that while some churches practise this because of their understanding of the Gospel others do not, considering that "the force of nineteen Centuries of tradition must not be set aside" (M18). *An Appraisal* asks, "is it not obvious that there are different conceptions here of the apostolic tradition and what it implies for an issue such as the ordination of women?"¹⁵ In response to M18 it raises issues rooted not only in Tradition but also in Scripture and Christology, and states that churches not ordaining women refrain from doing so because "we have no authority to change it, since we believe it belongs to the apostolic tradition of the Church".¹⁶

1 (c): Authority in the Church

At the Vancouver Assembly of WCC it was recommended that ways be found of furthering "the church's common quest for agreement on common ways of decision making and teaching authoritatively".¹⁷ *An Appraisal* endorses this and singles out some of the questions on authority which arise out of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*: "What are the constitutive elements of authority and order in the Church? What are the nature and role of decisive authority in the discernment of God's will as to the development of ministry in the Church in the past and in regard to present needs?"¹⁸

Touching the understanding of the threefold ministry it asks whether *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* sees it as constitutive of the Church's being, of God's will for the Church, or only of its ecumenical well-being? How is this decided? By what authority? Hence *An Appraisal* strongly supports the call from Vancouver for a study of the question of authority in the Church, since this is a key issue for the progress of ecumenism.

¹⁵ *An Appraisal*, 405.

¹⁶ *An Appraisal*, 413.

¹⁷ *Gathered for Life*, 50

¹⁸ *An Appraisal*, 405.

The body of *An Appraisal* comes under the heading, "*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the Faith of the Church". Each of the three sections of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is discussed, firstly in general appreciation, then with particular comments in which specific difficulties are noted. In what follows, the general appreciation will be summarised and a selection of the particular comments will be made in the hope of indicating the direction taken.

2. Baptism

The general appreciation begins with a statement that is significant for the way the Roman Catholic Church understands "the faith of the Church through the ages": "We find the text on Baptism to be grounded in the apostolic faith received and professed by the Catholic Church".¹⁹ The expressions of this faith are noted: the Scriptures and the witness of the early Church, along with the normative force of some forms of liturgical celebration. The coherent theological method employed in the text is singled out, as well as its Trinitarian, Christological and Pneumatological dimensions. The principal features of Baptism as a sacrament (already discussed above) are analysed at length.

Comments on some of the particular points have already been touched upon. Further to those the following two might be noted.

First, while the text explains incorporation into the Body of Christ it does not deal adequately with the present reality of Baptism in a divided Christianity, for the churches and ecclesial communities into which people are baptized are not in full communion with each other. The bonds established between them, while being deeper than what divides Christians, are still imperfect.

Secondly, regarding the discussion on "Baptism-Chris-mation-Confirmation" (B14), *An Appraisal* accepts the statement about the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Christian initiation as it has developed through the ages, while maintaining that the emergence of a distinctive sacramental rite called chrismation or confirmation is a normative development in the faith of the Church. This is a sacrament distinct from Baptism in which there is given a special and unique gift of the Holy Spirit.

The response to the Baptism section of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is thorough and generally affirming of the approach taken.

¹⁹ *An Appraisal*, 406.

However, some of the theological positions advanced in *An Appraisal* are overly conservative. There is no awareness shown that there is a legitimate pluralism of views within the Roman Catholic Church on doctrines such as original sin, even though there is an admission of the necessity of reformulation of such doctrine. There is no hint that there is a wide debate, both in theology and praxis, on the initiation of adults and infants, along with considerable confusion concerning the sacrament of confirmation. *An Appraisal*, surprisingly, is unaware of the massive renewal of the sacramental theology of initiation stemming from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1972). In an age when the witness of Christians is a vital aspect of evangelization, the Vatican response is narrowly sacramental. Thus it avoids any reaction to the treatment of the ethical consequences of Baptism in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, namely, the importance of bearing witness to the liberating action of Christ and the call to break down barriers in society if the fundamental baptismal unity of Christians is to be taken seriously (B4, 10; 6 Comm.).

3. Eucharist

In appreciation of the text, *An Appraisal* commends the careful use of sources, notably the liturgies of the first millenium and the writings of the Fathers. The strong Christological, Trinitarian and eschatological dimensions are underlined, as are its ecclesiological and missionary implications. There is approval of the basic elements used in explanation of the meaning of the Eucharist: thanksgiving, memorial, intercession, calling down of the Holy Spirit, meal of the new covenant. This structure follows the flow of classical eucharistic liturgies, and the theology is attuned to both the prayers and symbolic actions in these liturgies. The phrase used in this section, "conform with Catholic teaching", is revealing. Here above all the response has moved, deliberately it would seem, into the comparative mode. This is probably unavoidable.

The particular comments are very precise in this section, and rather technical. First, reference has already been made to the treatment of "real presence". Tied in with this is appreciation of the Trinitarian aspects developed in the section, "Eucharist as Invocation of the Spirit". *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* puts it this way:

Being assured by Jesus' promise in the words of institution that it will be answered, the Church prays to the Father for the gift of

the Holy Spirit in order that the eucharistic event may be a reality: the real presence of the crucified and risen Christ giving his life for all humanity. (E14)

This return to a more ancient view of the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is welcome to both Roman Catholics and Orthodox.

Secondly, the section on "Eucharist as Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ" is the heart of the E text. Far more than a mere "calling to mind" of a past event, this concept points to something in the present: the Eucharist is a living and effective sign of Christ's sacrifice, "accomplished once and for all on the cross, and still operative on behalf of all humankind" (E5). God's work is present and active in the liturgy, "the church's effective proclamation of God's mighty acts and promises" (E7). *An Appraisal* appreciated this approach, which it urges other churches to adopt, for this would be a significant breakthrough of ecumenical dialogue on the Eucharist. It is more critical of the notion of intercession which emerges in this discussion. It accepts the ecclesiological dimension which emerges in E8: "the Eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ who lives to make intercession for us... the Church offers its intercession in communion with Christ, our high priest". However, it asks whether the notion of intercession is used in a way that insufficiently explains the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, for intercession alone would not seem to encompass the continuity of Christ's saving work. The Catholic doctrine of the propitiatory character of the Eucharist cannot be equated with its intercessory character, because Catholics believe that there is also a sanctifying and reconciling activity of Christ taking place and that the Church has a more active role in the sacramental offering of Christ and in the self-offering of the participants with Christ – that is, we are actively associated with the passover of Christ to the Father by our participation in this sacramental rite. The *ARCIC Final Report* expresses this understanding better:

In the eucharistic prayer the Church continues to make a perfect memorial of Christ's death, and his members, united with God and one another, give thanks for all his mercies, entreat the benefits of his passion on behalf of the whole Church, participate in these benefits and enter into the movement of his self-offering.²⁰

The precision and clarity of this short passage better express the point *An Appraisal* finds missing in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*; but

²⁰ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report: Windsor, September 1981* (London: SPCK, 1981) 14.

An Appraisal is rather laboured and obscure, even for those familiar with the traditional Roman Catholic eucharistic theology.

Thirdly, among other criticisms in *An Appraisal*, it will be sufficient to note in passing its treatment of reservation of the eucharistic elements. The Roman Catholic Church asks of those who deny the reality of the real presence after the celebration, "what does this signify for their understanding of the real presence and the reality of the conversion?"²¹ The stance towards reservation is really seen as a litmus test of eucharistic faith.

An Appraisal is more critical of the eucharistic section of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* than of the other parts. Yet it gives insufficient attention to the valuable insights on the ethical and missionary consequences of the celebration: the consequent demand for reconciliation in the human family at all levels of social, economic and political life, the breaking down of the barriers of race, the restoration of human dignity. Failure to underline these aspects and an over-riding concern to get doctrine right can leave the Roman Catholic Church open to the charge *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* makes:

As participants in the Eucharist...we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world's situation and the human condition... We are placed under continual judgement by the persistence of unjust relationships of all kinds in our society. (E20)

Many commentators on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* have found the comment in E28 on liturgical reform to be a significant pointer for the future: "the best way forward towards unity in eucharistic celebration and communion is the renewal of the Eucharist itself in the different churches in regard to teaching and liturgy". Here the ancient adage that the rule of worship is the ground for the rule of faith (*lex orandi statuit legem credendi*) is embodied in a helpful way. As all the churches continue on the path of liturgical reform and gradually incorporate the historic elements mentioned in E28, their doctrine will inevitably converge. *An Appraisal* is somewhat carping and exhibits a lack of vision in its reference to this section.

4. Ministry

Well aware of the complexity of the ecumenical dialogue on ministry, *An Appraisal* suggests "that perhaps none of the Churches

²¹ *An Appraisal*, 412.

or ecclesial communities represented in the Faith and Order Commission can find its faith and practice in regard to ministry fully reflected and stated in this document in precisely the way that it has understood and experienced it".²² Theological, historical and sociological developments have all contributed to the shaping of the present structures, so it is remarkable that this section of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* goes so far towards an expression of "the faith of the Church through the ages".

Among those aspects *An Appraisal* singles out for appreciation is the setting of the ordained ministry within a wider ecclesiastical view of God's saving work in Christ in which diverse and complementary gifts are given to both community and individuals. The text regularly connects the ordained ministry with the mission of the Twelve and with the fundamental apostolicity of the Church. A balance is kept between the gracious initiative of God and a commissioning by the Church in ordination, the description of which, *An Appraisal* says remains open to a sacramental understanding, especially in the light of the discussion on the specifying intention in ordination (M39), its eucharistic contents (M41), and recognition of its unrepeatability as a God-given charism. *An Appraisal* notes the significance of the treatment of the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons, even if they are considered more as functional tasks that can exist concretely in different patterns (M22).

The most important comment made in the general section again concerns ecclesiology. Having already noted the way in which ordained ministry is constantly related to the Church, *An Appraisal* argues that one essential dimension of the Church remains obscure. It speaks of the Church "in a real and effective sense" being an icon of the presence of God and his kingdom in the world, always in the sense that God remains faithful to his promise in Christ. This would seem to mean that in some way the Church mediates God's presence. The basic ministerial structures participate in that sacramental or iconic dimension – as is said a few paragraphs later in commentary on the idea of representation of Christ by ordained ministers as heralds and ambassadors, this concept needs further qualification to show how "the ordained ministry is in and for the church an effective and sacramental reality by which the minister acts *in persona Christi*".²³ Only the ordained minister represents Christ in a personal and sacramental way, and so, in the Catholic view, only he can preside at the Eucharist.

²² *An Appraisal*, 412.

²³ *An Appraisal*, 412.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry frequently uses an argument from antiquity in dealing with the evolution of the forms of ordained ministry (M19-21), partly in order to help communities which have not retained the episcopate to appreciate it as a sign of the continuity and unity of the Church (M38), and maybe even recover this sign (M53 b). While this is valuable, the Vatican response calls for further study on the normative status of such antiquity: what is the role of decisive authority, it asks, in discerning such developments in the past and in regards to the needs of the Church today?

Particular comments range over a wide area. Attention will be paid only to those on the forms of ordained ministry and episcopacy and episcopal succession.

First, *An Appraisal* challenges Faith and Order to distinguish further between the fundamental and constitutive core of the threefold ministry and the historical shape it has taken. At this point, the response, somewhat uncharacteristically, suggests that "an ecumenical discernment is needed to see what belongs to the constitutive structure of the Church".²⁴ This is an acknowledgement that there is still need for reform in most churches – in the collegial expressions of ministry and in the diaconate, for instance (M24). Touching collegiality, *An Appraisal* finds this aspect of the episcopal ministry to be inadequately expressed, as also is the teaching function of bishops (the *magisterium*). Bishops are more than a "focus of unity". It also asks in the light of the discussion in M27 of the symbolising of regional unity whether this can be raised to the universal level in view of the text's recognition of the need for a representative service of oversight, continuity and unity in the Church. Clearly, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has avoided any discussion of the papacy in this paragraph.

Secondly, the Lima text has offered a thorough discussion of succession in the apostolic tradition. This has been acknowledged as one of its greatest strengths. However, *An Appraisal* would push it further. When M36 describes the succession as "one of the ways...in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed", the Vatican response asks Faith and Order why it cannot also accept it as a "guarantee" of the continuity and unity of the Church (M38). Is it an effective sign of this (as was stated in the earlier 1974 draft: M34) or is it not? In Catholic ecclesiology the bishop has more than a function of oversight. In his person the bishop represents Christ to the local church; the bishop is a sacramental sign of integration of all other ministries; the bishop is a focus of communion. There is a twofold

²⁴ *An Appraisal*, 413.

aspect to episcopal succession: the bishop embodies catholicity in time – the continuity of the Church across generations – and also the communion with all local churches lived in each generation. Thus present communities are linked up, through the bishops, to apostolic origins, teaching, and way of living. In this understanding, episcopal succession is more than a sign; it is an effective guarantee of the continuity and unity of the Church. It is the expression of Christ's faithfulness always to the Church. There is an acknowledgement, though, that individual office-bearers need to be faithful and diligent guarantors.

Finally, *An Appraisal* finds the treatment of Mutual Recognition of Ministries unsatisfactory. This is the crux of endeavours towards Christian unity. The issues still are the sacramental nature of ordination and the relation of this to historic episcopal succession. More than a recovery of the sign of episcopal succession is needed. What are called for are "newly gained convictions about God's will and the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding the constitutive features of church order, the episcopal succession and its exercise in ordination."²⁵

So, while acknowledging the growth in mutual respect between the churches, the present bonds of communion and "the many ways in which continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission have been preserved in communities which have not retained the form of the historic episcopate"²⁶ the Vatican response indicates the considerable difficulties still before us in this area. *An Appraisal* seems wary of multi-lateral dialogue on this issue, suggesting that many particular questions cannot be solved before entering into concrete union negotiations.

One theologian has remarked that the Vatican's positive appraisal of ministry provides other churches with "transformative proddings" but does not do the same for the Catholic Church.²⁷ This is certainly the tone of *An Appraisal's* concluding remarks in this section. It urges other churches to accept the suggestions of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, yet gives no indication that there is any change called for in its own church. If the further dialogue called for on these issues proceeds, though, it is inevitable that "proddings" will come for the Roman Catholic Church as well. Vatican II did not resolve all the issues concerning recognition of ministries, and the continuing debate concerning lay ministries, along with the depletion of the ranks of

²⁵ *An Appraisal*, 415.

²⁶ *An Appraisal*, 415.

²⁷ Joan M. McGuire, "The Official Vatican Response to BEM: Ministry", in *Ecumenical Trends*, 17 (1988) 43.

ordained ministers in some parts of the world, is inevitably provoking further reflection that will have ecumenical implications.

THE CHALLENGE OF RECEPTION

In its concluding section *An Appraisal* briefly examines some of the consequences of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. It agrees with Faith and Order that theological dialogue must not be isolated from other ecumenical efforts: the dialogue of charity, common witness, search for justice. It urges Faith and Order to keep before itself the goal of visible unity. The ecumenical movement, it states, aims not only at a renewal of attitudes of Christians but also at a rethinking of relationships between divided Christian communities. Finally, it draws together its suggestions regarding the three sections of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and recommits the Roman Catholic Church to continue in the process of seeking unity in faith as the basis for visible unity.

While there is much to be commended in *An Appraisal*, it suffers from one significant flaw in its careful avoidance of one of the queries posed by Faith and Order concerning *reception*: "the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical and spiritual life and witness".

There are obviously many aspects of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* which the Roman Catholic Church can make use of. There are some it can be challenged by. Why the reticence? The text can be used with great value in theological colleges. It has been widely discussed at parish level. Many of its themes under the "meaning" sections would provide splendid springboards for catechesis and for both personal and corporate prayer. It is unfortunate that the authors of *An Appraisal* did not see fit to recommend any of these. Thus the Vatican response fails to attend to the call for "spiritual reception" and concentrates exclusively and narrowly on theological reception. It is extremely doubtful whether the process of reception can be so neatly divided.

Even when one gives full allowance to the particular Roman Catholic view of the subsistence of the apostolic tradition within its own boundaries, the Vatican response slips far too easily at times into comparative theology. While it admits that *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is "formulated with the help of a new theological vocabulary which necessarily includes new horizons of thought" it often calls for the use not only of traditional teaching but also of traditional

language. The framers of *An Appraisal* have yet to clarify for themselves the issue of theological reformulation and to attend to the work of many Catholic theologians in this regard. In fairness, though, it must be admitted that the approach taken in *An Appraisal* is much more temperate than the response of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the ARCIC *Final Report*. That is the only other semi-official Roman response to an ecumenically agreed statement, and it held out for the exact formulations of earlier ecumenical councils with no concession at all to the new language and thought-forms, which the very nature of ecumenical dialogue demands.

The process of ecumenical dialogue inserts theologians into a unique relationship in which there is an evolution towards better understanding of each other, resulting in convergence or, even, agreement. It is very difficult for the churches to read the results of such work in the same spirit when they have been detached from the process. We need to give much further consideration to this and attempt a reading of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in the light of many bi-lateral agreements which have appeared in the last ten years. New and ever-deepening bonds of communion have been built up through this process, and this web of relationships has set a new context in which to receive such statements. *An Appraisal* should be seen only as a first step in this direction. It is a sure and committed step, indicated by the length and depth of its comments. Indeed, *An Appraisal* ends on this note, calling for further dialogue and pledging Roman Catholic involvement for the future.

It is fitting to conclude with words from the First Assembly of the WCC at Amsterdam in 1948: "Although we cannot fully meet, our Lord will not allow us to turn away from one another."²⁸

²⁸ Quoted in J. Deschner, "A Vision of Church Unity Today", *Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988) 351.